



# Heaven, Purgatory, Hell...

Three historical pontifical documents respond  
to one of the questions that preoccupy men of every age:  
what is the destiny of souls after death?

## **FIRE WILL TEST THE WORK OF EACH ONE**

Truth in the Gospel affirms that if anyone shall utter blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, neither in this life nor in the future will it be forgiven him (cf. Mt 12:32). By this it is granted that certain sins of the present be understood which, however, are forgiven in the future life.

And since the Apostle affirms that “fire will test the work of each one, of what kind it is” and “if any man’s work burn, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:13, 15).

And since these same Greeks are said to believe and affirm truly and undoubtedly that the souls of those who after a penance has been received but not performed, or who, without mortal sin yet die with venial and slight sin, can be cleansed after death and can be helped by the suffrages of the Church.

We, since they say a place of purgation of this kind has not been indicated to them with a certain and proper name by their teachers, we indeed, calling it “Purgatory,” according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers, wish that in the future it be called by that name in their area.

For in that transitory fire certainly sins, though not criminal or capital, which before have not been remitted through penance but were small and minor sins, are cleansed, and these weigh heavily even after death, if they have been forgiven in this life. Moreover, if anyone without repentance dies in mortal sin, without a doubt he is tortured forever by the flames of eternal hell.

*Innocent IV. Excerpt from the letter  
Sub catholicæ professione,  
of the First Council of Lyons to the  
Bishop of Tusculum, of the Lega-  
tion of the Apostolic See among the  
Greeks, 6/3/1254 (Dz 456-457)*

## **EACH ONE RECEIVES ACCORDING AS HE HAS DONE**

By this edict which will prevail forever, with apostolic authority we declare:

that according to the common arrangement of God, souls of all the Saints who departed from this world before the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ; also of the Holy Apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, virgins and the other faithful who died after the Holy Baptism of Christ had been received by them, in whom nothing

was to be purged, when they departed, nor will there be when they shall depart also in the future; or if then there was or there will be anything in these to be purged when after their death they have been purged;

and the souls of children departing before the use of free will, reborn and baptized in that same Baptism of Christ, when all have been baptized, immediately after their death and that aforesaid purgation in those who were in need of a purgation of this kind, even before the resumption of their bodies and the general judgement after the ascension of Our Saviour, Our Lord Jesus Christ, into Heaven, have been, are and will be in Heaven, in the Kingdom of Heaven and in Celestial Paradise with Christ, united in the company of the Holy Angels;

and after the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ have seen and see the divine essence by intuitive vision, and even face to face, with no mediating creature, serving in the capacity of an object seen, but divine essence immediately revealing itself plainly, clearly and openly to them;

and seeing thus they enjoy the same divine essence, and also from such division and enjoyment their souls, which now have departed, are truly blessed and they have eternal life



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**Innocent IV** – In that transitory fire certainly sins, though not criminal or capital, which before have not been remitted through penance, but were small and minor sins, are cleansed



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**Benedict XII** – Moreover, we declare that according to the common arrangement of God, the souls of those who depart in actual mortal sin immediately after their death descend to hell where they are tortured by infernal punishments



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**Eugene IV** – The souls of those, who after the reception of Baptism have incurred no stain of sin at all, are immediately received into Heaven, and see clearly the one and triune God Himself, just as He is

Innocent IV, fourteenth-century engraving; Benedict XII, Church of the Territorial Abbey of Wettingen-Mehrerau, Voralberg (Austria); Eugene IV, Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome

and rest; and also [the souls] of those who will afterwards depart, will see that same divine essence, and will enjoy it before the General Judgement;

and that such vision of the divine essence and its enjoyment makes void the acts of faith and hope in them, inasmuch as faith and hope are proper theological virtues;

and that after there has begun or will be such intuitive and face-to-face enjoyment in these, the same vision and enjoyment without interruption or departure of the aforesaid vision and enjoyment exist continuously and will continue even up to the Last Judgement and from then even unto eternity.

Moreover, we declare that according to the common arrangement of God, the souls of those who depart in actual mortal sin immediately after their death descend to hell where they are tortured by infernal punishments, and that nevertheless on the day of Judgement all men with their bodies will make themselves ready to render an account of their own deeds before the tribunal of Christ, “so that everyone may receive the proper things of the body according as he

has done whether it be good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10).

*Benedict XII. Excerpt from the Edict Benedictus Deus, 29/1/1336 (Dz 530-531)*

### WHAT IS THE FATE OF THE DECEASED?

If those truly penitent have departed in the love of God, before they have made satisfaction by worthy fruits of penance for sins of commission and omission, the souls of these are cleansed after death by purgatorial punishments; and so that they may be released from punishments of this kind, the suffrages of the living faithful are of advantage to them, namely, the sacrifices of Masses, prayers, and almsgiving, and other works of piety, which are customarily performed by the faithful for other faithful according to the institutions of the Church.

And that the souls of those, who after the reception of Baptism have incurred no stain of sin at all, and also those, who after the contraction of the stain of sin whether in their bodies, or when released from the same bod-

ies, as we have said before, are purged, are immediately received into Heaven, and see clearly the one and triune God Himself, just as He is, yet according to the diversity of merits, one more perfectly than another.

Moreover, the souls of those who depart in actual mortal sin or in original sin only, descend immediately into hell but to undergo punishments of different kinds.

We likewise define that the holy Apostolic See, and the Roman Pontiff, hold the primacy throughout the entire world; and that the Roman Pontiff himself is the successor of Blessed Peter, the Chief of the Apostles, and the true Vicar of Christ, and that he is the head of the entire Church, and the father and teacher of all Christians; and that full power was given to him in blessed Peter by Our Lord Jesus Christ, to feed, rule, and govern the universal Church; just as is contained in the acts of the ecumenical Councils and in the sacred canons. ✧

*Eugene IV. Excerpt from the Bull Lætentur cæli, of the Council of Florence, 6/7/1439 (Dz 693-694)*